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Speech on bill to provide
for a state hospital for
the insane

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SPEECH

OF

MR. RAYNER, OF HERTFORD,

*On the Bill to provide for the establishment of
a State Hospital for the Insane in North
Carolina; delivered in the House of Com-
mons, December 21st., 1848.*

Mr. R. said, that in contributing his humble aid towards the accomplishment of the purpose proposed by the Bill before the House, he could truly say he never performed a more agreeable duty, as a public man. It accorded with his views of duty as a representative, his sense of State pride as a North Carolinian, and his feelings of humanity as a man. The object of government, (said Mr. R.) is to take care of all. And the Representative of a confiding and generous people can perform no more welcome task, than that of providing for a mitigation of one of the most awful calamities visited upon our race. 'Tis true, those bereft of reason are disconnected with the political influences which make and unmake public men; they have no agency in sending us here, in elevating us to still higher places, or in visiting

censure upon us for what may be our misdeeds. But whilst this consideration does not release us from the obligations of duty, what a noble opportunity does it at the same time afford us, for the exercise of disinterested good. To our pride as North Carolinians, this measure appeals in the most forcible and patriotic language. North Carolina is the last of the old thirteen, with the exception of Delaware, that has not made provision for the indigent insane. Shall we allow this reproach of insensibility to human suffering longer to rest upon our name? So far from shunning the responsibility of this measure, we ought rather to rejoice at the opportunity it affords us, of vindicating the generosity of our people, and elevating the character of our State. To our feelings of humanity as men, the appeal is irresistible. And it is indeed a consoling reflection, that amid the din and confusion of political strife, we may here for a while at least, find a resting place, and engage in a work calculated to still all the angry passions of our nature; we may for a time, pause in our partizan struggles and vie with each other in doing the work of good.

In this age of discovery and improvement, with the recorded experience of so many countries, and such a length of time, it would be labor lost, to attempt to prove, that these institutions for the especial benefit of the insane, with buildings and fixtures erected with a peculiar view to the purpose contemplated, and under the control and management of those exclusively devoted to such duties, are better calculated to restore those who are not incurable, and to administer to the comfort of those who are, than any other system ever yet devised. The great utility and incomparable blessings of these institutions are not to be established by any process of logical deduction. They do not rest on any learned and plausible theories of the physiologist and the physician; nor on the fanciful and ingenious speculations of the phrenologist and metaphysician. They are confirmed by the facts of inductive experience, by the records of statistical data care-

fully preserved ; a knowledge of which places the matter beyond controversy.

These statistical data prove conclusively, that in most cases, insanity proceeds from physical disease, acting through neglect or improper treatment upon the natural functions of the brain. How apparent then, must it be to every one, who has witnessed much of the sufferings, and difficulty of treatment of mere physical disease, that this malady of the mind, depending in a great degree on physical derangement, requires a degree of care, of knowledge, of unremitting attention, of peculiar capacity on the part of those entrusted with its relief, that the ordinary physician has neither the time, the ability, nor the adaptation of character to apply to it. It requires a peculiar endowment of moral as well as intellectual faculties, to "minister to a mind diseased." This kind of talent is rare ; but thanks to a kind Providence, such is the expansive and prolific nature of the human mind, that the supply has thus far kept pace with the demand, which the benevolence of government has created. This remarkable kind of talent however, flourishes, and finds a theatre for its exercise, not in the crowded thorough-fares of commerce, not in the turmoil and agitation of worldly employment, not in gay saloons of fashion ; but in the quiet and partially isolated retirement of nature. Unpretending, benevolent, and gentle in its character, it shrinks from rude contact with the noisy world. Hence it is, that these institutions for the relief of the insane, must assume a regulation somewhat paternal and domestic in its character. Genial air, cheerful prospects, and healthful exercises, are indispensable to their successful operation. In a country of such practical habits, and of such sparse population as ours, such requirements as these I have mentioned, are even for the affluent, beyond the reach of private enterprise ; and as for the indigent, charity feels that its duty is performed in merely "feeding the hungry and clothing the poor." It requires the sanction of government to provide perma-

nently for the wants of those who appeal to us only through their maniac cries ; and who usually excite our horrors as much or more, than they do our sympathies. Government owes it not only to the destitute maniac, to provide for *his* sufferings, but it owes it to the more fortunate, to protect *them*, from the horrifying spectacle of an aberration of intellect in their fellow beings. And in accomplishing so beneficent a purpose, for both the sane and the insane, can it, ought it to hesitate, in imposing the paltry burthens upon those more highly favoured by the God of nature, necessary for their own, as well as for the good of their stricken brethren ?

The system now generally pursued for the treatment of the insane, in nearly all the States of this Union, as well as in all civilized countries, belongs to the discovery of modern science and to the progress of modern improvement. Until within the period of the existence of our own government, young as it is, the old plan of the dark ages—which grew out of the idea, that those bereft of reason were the victims of God's especial displeasure, and therefore had no claims on man's sympathy—of treating the insane as outcasts, was the only one known. The dark and noisome cell, the chain and the hand cuff, the bar and the bolt, lash and the torture, the scanty meal and the time-worn vesture, were, for ages, the portion of these victims of misfortune. This cruel system, and the false idea upon which it rested, are now, and it is hoped, forever rejected, as unwise, unfeeling, unchristian. New light upon this, as upon nearly every other branch of knowledge, has dawned upon the world. The discovery of the philanthropic Pinel, during the excesses of the French Revolution, whose horrors were so naturally productive of insanity—that "*kindness and firmness*" were the great agents in relieving and alleviating the miseries of derangement—first gave the impetus to that benevolent system, which has dried up so many tears, healed so many wounded hearts, and soothed so many pangs of suffering. With rapid strides, this hu-

mane and wise system has marched over the Christian world. France, unrivaled as she ever is in science; England, foremost as she always is in deeds of greatness and glory, and the States of this Union, the wonder and admiration of the world, as they are, in adventure, enterprise, and improvement, have reared this benevolent structure upon sure foundations, and in cementing it with the tears of sympathy, have provided for the wants and sufferings of millions yet unborn.

Experience, that teacher whose precepts carry proof, and frequently conviction, in their very utterance, has established beyond controversy, the fact, that brute force, physical restraint, and personal severity, instead of relieving, only tend to aggravate the tortures of the maniac. The mind of man, whether sane or insane, whether aspiring in its loftiest flight to the sublime and the infinite, or whether clouded in its vision by the dark curtain of despair, can not be chained and tethered by human force. It came from God, and nothing short of the fiat of heaven can chain it down to earth. Deprive it, in its dark state of gloom, of those genial influences which nature alone, aided by those heavenly qualities of gentleness and sympathy, can administer; and in the paroxysms of its own phrenzied energy, it shrinks back within itself, and literally devours its own existence. On the other hand, a proper regard to physical and mental culture at the same time, if applied in season, rarely fails of affording relief. Change of scene and association, genial food, personal comfort, balmy air, and cheerful views, tend to divert the mind from its painful contemplations, and at the same time to invigorate the physical system; whilst "*kindness and firmness*," those great agents in governing and directing the human mind in all phases of its condition, serve to guide and control it, in its struggles to throw off the shackles of darkness. Confine the poor maniac with felons and criminals; instead of hearing the accents of kindness, let him hear only the clanking of his chains; instead of his vision being greeted with

the appliances of a cheerful chamber and a comfortable couch, let him see nothing but the walls and grates of his dungeon, and his bed of straw; instead of witnessing the impulses of feeling hearts, let him discover that he is cut off from all sympathy of his race, (for strange as it may seem, his perceptions are rather quickened than destroyed by his malady,) and instead of subduing the wild passions of his distempered mind, you only stamp it with a conviction of his degradation, and he sinks down in hopeless and incurable despair. These indispensable means to which I have alluded, cannot be secured in the busy and anxious theatre of industry and agitation, in which the world is engaged. The domestic hearth, with all its sympathies and kindness, cannot command them. Then you must resort to comparatively isolated locations; you must obtain the services of those who devote their lives exclusively to this noble and praise worthy vocation, you must congregate those unfortunate victims, where time, opportunity, knowledge, and experience can all be commanded in ministering to their wants.

Whilst the balance of the christian world is moving on in these noble enterprises, shall North Carolina, our native land, where repose the ashes of our fathers, and where the destiny of our children is cast—shall North Carolina stand still, with folded arms and slumbering eyelids? Shall our people longer bear the reproach of insensibility to human woe; or of niggardliness, in refusing to grant a pittance of that bounty with which kind Heaven has blessed us, for the purpose of lifting that dark curtain which shuts out the light of reason from the minds of so many of our fellow beings? Shall we, as the chosen guardians of the rights and interests of a confiding people, repose so little trust in their generosity, their humanity, their justice, as to fail to do that, which appeals to us not only in the language of sympathy, but in the stern demands of duty? Read that Memorial now lying on your desks, to which is affixed the name of one* who is

*Miss D. L. Dix.

devoting her life to doing good; who comes among us as the friend of the unfortunate, the poor and the needy; who is an ornament, not only to her sex, but to human nature itself; whose meekness and gentleness of character, and whose labors, fatigues and exposure in behalf of suffering humanity, appeal to us, by all the ennobling considerations of chivalry and devotion to her sex. Read that memorial, the unbribed and disinterested tribute which a feeling heart pays to misfortune's claims, and you will there see our duty inscribed in language which it requires a heart of adamant to disregard. You there see that there are hundreds within the borders of our State, who are immured in noxious cells, inhaling the "vapors of dungeons," confined with felons, and dragging out a miserable existence on beds of straw—and for no other crime, than that of being the victims of an afflictive dispensation from Heaven. And must this continue to be? 'Tis true, these victims of calamity cannot appeal to our judgments in the language of reason; but they appeal to our hearts in the tones of lamentation and woe. If we fail to perform our duty, the shriek of every maniac in our borders will hereafter sound the note of reproach upon our names. Their dismal cries and awful groans will haunt us in our slumbers, and their ghastly visages will freeze our hearts with terror, even to our dying day. Whilst to our shame, we must admit, that North Carolina is behind most of her sisters in the great physical improvements and enterprises of the age; yet it has ever been our boast, that in all the attributes of the private and social virtues, we acknowledge no superior. Let us now prove that this is no vain and idle vaunting. Whilst other States may excel us in enterprize, in wealth and in public spirit, yet let us recollect, in the language of a lamented son, it has long been our pride, that there are none,

" ——— Whose doors open faster,
At the knock of distress, or the tale of disaster."

Although we may not boast of our populous Cities and

Commercial Marts ; although we may not have as many proud Seminaries of learning ; although we may not cover our surface with a net-work of Rail Roads and Canals ; yet let us prove that we have hearts to feel for misfortune, and that we know how to provide for the private wants and personal comforts of our people, if we are somewhat regardless of their public pride and prosperity.

I am aware that this bill may be objected to on account of what may seem to be the magnitude of the sum proposed to be appropriated. The amount is not large, compared with the purposes contemplated, and the benefits to be realized. It cannot be less, if the Institution is to answer the ends designed. If we are to provide for the insane at all, we must make provision for the whole of them. From the best information that can be obtained, there will probably be not less than 250 patients in the State. And the same information authorises the conclusion, that a building necessary for the comfortable provision of that number cannot be built for much less than \$100,000. I learn that about ten years since, the State of Tennessee—that noble daughter of the Old North State, who here presents to her mother such a glorious example—erected an institution for the insane at a cost of about 25 or 30 thousand dollars. It was found to be utterly unfit for the purposes intended—and one year since, the Legislature of that State concluded to abandon it as an outlay of so much money lost, and made an appropriation of \$100,000 for the erection of a new one. Let us take warning by this example. If we attempt to provide for the insane at all, let us do it in a style commensurate with our pride, our character and our ability ; above all, commensurate with the wants of our people. Gentlemen should recollect that a building of this sort is not like a private dwelling. Space, air, prospect, peculiar arrangement are indispensable. Let us then, instead of wasting \$30,000 or \$50,000 to no purpose, expend what is requisite ; and there it is for generations, complete in all its parts, the memorial of our generosity, the pride of the State, the asylum of the unfortunate.

So far from this Institution being objectionable on account of the burthen it will impose on the people, it is strongly recommended on the score of economy. Have gentlemen ever turned their attention to the sums annually expended in some of the counties of the State, for keeping in confinement the indigent insane, and in others, by way of allowance to their destitute parents and friends, who take care of them? This charge belongs to County expense, and comes out of the County tax; but still, the people have to pay it. And I doubt very much, whether the tax proposed by this bill, which can continue but a few years, even if it were perpetual, would bear more heavily on the people than the charge already existing, on account of the indigent insane. This expense is now incurred in keeping them in prison, beyond the reach of relief; we propose to convert it into the means of ministering to their comfort, and restoring them to reason. As an example of this false notion of economy, I learn there is a maniac in the prison of Stokes County, the keeping of whom for several years has cost the County some \$1600 or \$1700: and this poor unfortunate being is, no doubt, in a worse condition now, than when he first entered the door of his prison—perhaps beyond the reach of restoration forever. How much better, wiser, and more humane is it, to convert this annual charge upon the respective counties, now expended in aggravating the sufferings of the afflicted, into a means of ministering to their comfort and aiding in their relief. Let gentlemen recollect, that it is the taxes for County purposes, that are felt most grievously by the people. As a mere question of economy, then, we may well conclude, that such an institution will lessen the burthen now imposed for the relief of the poor, to as great or even a greater extent than will be necessary for its establishment and successful operation. In considering the item of *expense*, we should also recollect, that the more comfortable and commodious this institution may be, the better may we expect it to support itself. Whilst we provide for taking care of the poor, the wealthy who may seek an asylum

beneath its shelter, are expected to pay for the benefits received. If then, you make a meagre appropriation for the erection of a building that will barely answer for the wants of the destitute, we cannot expect those who are wealthy or in even comfortable circumstances, to place their friends there. They will resort to other States for that comfort and relief they cannot find at home. By examining the reports from these institutions in other States, we find that many of them not only go a great way towards paying their own expenses, but in some few instances they have actually yielded a nett income besides. Let us not then, by a false economy, throw away what we do appropriate. Let us not, for the sake of saving a few thousands now, run the risk of a failure in the purpose contemplated. Let us erect such an institution as will answer the wants of all our insane, both the rich and the poor ; that the former may be induced to seek that relief from it, which will enable us, in a great measure, to take care of the latter.

As to the method proposed in the bill before us, of raising the money necessary for the erection of this institution, by a slight increase of the tax on real estate and on polls, I think it eminently proper, and by far the most sure and practicable. 'Tis true, it falls upon all classes and interests in society. And it is right that it should—not only because it is intended for the benefit of all classes but because every one should be allowed to contribute in proportion to his ability, to what will belong to all. It is right that the poor man as well as the rich should feel that having aided in its establishment, he and his children have a vested interest in its benefits. It is for no temporary purpose, it is for no sectional advantages. It is for posterity. It is right then, that the land which is immovable, that the permanent wealth and capital of the country, should bear the charge. Again, the method proposed is certain and definite. Make a charge upon the treasury generally, and I fear, that after providing for our liabilities, which *must* be paid, nothing will be left

for the purposes of charity. This method of raising the money is recommended by another consideration. The people will submit to it without murmur or complaint. It is not like imposing a tax for any sectional improvement, the benefits of which may be local, and against which the feelings and prejudices of other sections may be aroused. It is for no purpose of doubtful utility. It appeals to all the nobler and better feelings of our nature, and every generous heart in the State must acknowledge its importance. The demagogue who prates so much about the rights of the poor, will be disarmed, and hissed from the stump, when he attempts to excite against us the prejudices of the poor, by crying out, taxes! taxes! It is mainly for the wants of the poor, that we now propose to provide. I would not, if I could, deprive the poor man of the *privilege* of aiding in the erection of this institution. The poor man will scarcely feel the addition of the slight tax proposed. Small as may be the pittance paid by the poor man, yet it is his *right* to contribute it, and it would be a hardship to deprive him of it. Like the mite that constituted the offering of the poor widow in the Scripture, it will be hallowed by the feelings and motives that actuated the giver.

I am aware it may be said, there is no pressing necessity for our founding an institution for the insane in this State; inasmuch as the number of such institutions in other States affords every facility and convenience for the relief of the afflicted among us. The mere statement of this objection carries its own refutation with it. In the first place, our State pride should revolt at this idea of dependence upon the liberality and benevolence of our sister States. How can we reconcile ourselves to the thought, of relying upon the labors of others, for those blessings which are equally within our reach, as the reward of a discharge of public duty? How can we absolve ourselves from the obligations of this duty, by availing ourselves of the means afforded by those who have performed *theirs*, instead of their reasoning on the false premises thus advanced? In the second place, this

reliance on the institutions of other States, provides for the rich only, who can afford to bear the expense ; whilst it leaves the poor and needy to suffer. And it is mainly for the poor and the destitute that we are called on to provide. 'Tis true, they have nothing to give in return but the tribute of grateful hearts ; and what higher reward ought a beneficent government to desire. The duty of government to provide for the physical wants of the poor, is recognised and observed by all Christian Countries ; and in our own State, the law makes provision for that. If it is the duty of the Legislature to provide for the corporal wants of the poor, how much greater the obligation to provide for their mental suffering. For, what are hunger, nakedness and want compared with the loss of reason ? What are all the tortures of the quivering flesh, compared with those of the brain ; through which are "whirling the thousand shapes of fury" ?

" For pleasures, hopes, affection gone,
The wretch may bear, and yet live on ;
But there's a blank repose in this,
A calm stagnation, that were bliss
To the keen, burning, harrowing pain,
Thats' felt throughout the breast and brain."

In the third place, this dependance on the institutions of other States, considered as a question of political economy, is decidedly objectionable. It carries the money, and that to no inconsiderable extent, from our borders ; not to come back to us through the regular channels of commercial exchange, but keeping up in proportion to its expenditure, a constant drain upon our circulating medium, the current of which has no reflux. In the fourth place, a reliance upon distant institutions prevents that resort to *early* remedial treatment, which experience has fully established to be so absolutely necessary to the restoration of the insane. Distance, expense, exposure both to the accidents of travel and to the public eye, deter the friends of the unfortunate from an early resort to distant asylums, until delay frequently places the suffer-

er beyond the reach of cure. How necessary then, to have the means of relief near at hand, to have an asylum of our own, inviting the wretched to its hospitable shelter ; a structure built at the public charge, in which every freeman in the land may feel he has an interest.

Under these considerations, Mr. Speaker, can we doubt as to our duty ? And if we know that duty, shall we fail to perform it ? Shall we hesitate to impose the slight tax proposed, lest heartless demagogues may cry out against taxation, and attempt to inflame the public mind ? Sir, the people will sustain us. Our constituents have hearts—hearts of sympathy and of feeling, and to them will we appeal. We shall receive their gratitude, instead of their censure. Think of how many minds now shrouded in darkness, we may be the means of restoring to the light of knowledge and of christian hope. Think of the many whose awful ravings of despair, we may convert into grateful invocations of blessings on our heads. Think of how many anxious and watchful mothers' and sisters' cheeks, that are now suffused with the tears of sorrow, we may cheer and enliven with the smiles of joy. Think of how many a fond father's heart now sunk in despondency, at the contemplation of the suffering of an afflicted son or daughter, will leap with joy at the successful issue of our labors. Although the thanks and the prayers of their grateful hearts may never reach our ears, yet like holy incense they will ascend to Heaven, calling down the favors of Almighty goodness on our efforts. Who knows but in future time, some son or daughter, or more remote descendant of one of ourselves, may be overtaken with misfortune, may pine in penury and want, may be turned with a rude hand from the door of plenty, may be exposed to the peltings of the storm, may suffer the gnawing pangs of hunger, may feel the horrors of ignominy and shame—till the brain reels under the shock, and the mind becomes eclipsed with maniac darkness. Yes sir, who of us knows, but that hereafter some child of misery, in whose veins shall flow the same blood that now pulsates in our hearts, may be incarcerated in

the felon's dungeon, wear the chafing fetters of confinement, and vent their unheeded and maniac cries to prison walls? In the dispensation of Providence this may take place. Then we are appealed to not only by every consideration of patriotic pride, of representative duty, and of an expanded benevolence and christian philanthropy—but we are appealed to by what may be wants and sufferings of our own flesh and blood, to act, and to act promptly. Let us lay the foundation of an institution, to which our posterity can point with pride, whenever they mention our names. Let us rear a structure beneath whose dome, heaven born charity shall set up her altar, and benevolence erect her shrine—within whose walls, the unfortunate of posterity shall find a refuge and a home, when we shall be no more. We shall thus erect to our memories a monument more imperishable than one of brass; and we shall inscribe on grateful hearts, in letters of enduring affection, the name of her,* from whose efforts are issuing streams of goodness, that are beginning to overflow for the benefit of mankind.

*This noble and praise-worthy woman, (Miss D. L. Dix, of New York) has long been devoting her life and fortune to the relief of suffering humanity, especially of the indigent insane. She has, by her unremitting exertions and personal appeals, succeeded in inducing the Legislatures of many of the States to make provision for the insane; and is now urging upon Congress to appropriate five millions of acres of the public lands to this humane purpose. May her efforts be crowned with success.

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